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**Citation for published version:**

Kapasi, I & Galloway, L 2015, 'Work-life balance in home-based businesses: a UK study', *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation*, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 33-42. <https://doi.org/10.5367/ije.2015.0170>

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.5367/ije.2015.0170](https://doi.org/10.5367/ije.2015.0170)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Heriot-Watt Research Portal](#)

**Document Version:**

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

**Published In:**

International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation

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# Work–life balance in home-based businesses

## A UK study

Isla Kapasi and Laura Galloway

**Abstract:** *Home-based businesses are increasing in number throughout Western economies. One of the benefits of a home-based business is asserted to be improved work–life balance, yet there is little empirical evidence to support this assertion. Using a qualitative methodology, this paper explores the work–life balance in eight home-based businesses in the UK. Motivations for working at home include the desire for improved work–life balance, but the achievement of this aim among the study participants was found to be nuanced. Critically, home-based business is another employment context in which the work–life balance must be managed. This management is especially needed because of the blurring of work and life time and space, which may demand more self-discipline in home-based workers compared with those in employment or self-employment remote from the home.*

**Keywords:** *work–life balance; home-based business; self-employment; business ownership; motivations*

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This paper aims to contribute to our currently limited knowledge about work–life balance in the business ownership context. In particular, it focuses on a study of work–life balance in home-based businesses.

Home-based business (HBB) ownership and operation are discussed here in the context of entrepreneurship. The paper thus includes HBB as a form of entrepreneurship in that it comprises business creation or self-employment activity (for example, see Reynolds *et al*, 2003). Elsewhere the entrepreneurship literature is dominated by the study of large-value, or potential large-value, business venturing. Ahl (2006) notes that the associated focus on financial growth at the firm level as the defining feature of entrepreneurship precludes other forms of entrepreneurship from the analysis. Bureau and Fendt (2011) refer to the corre-

sponding marginalization of entrepreneurship of low value – such as that characterized by the micro- and small firms sector – as having resulted in a trivialization of their importance. Outcomes of entrepreneurship other than financial growth have been similarly marginalized. This paper subscribes to the idea that, while the micro-, small and home-based sectors may include firms of low value relative to larger firms, they are far from trivial, and these types of enterprises are in fact amongst the *most* contributory forms of entrepreneurship as a consequence of their scale and ubiquity. This contribution may include cumulative economic value, but equally includes other outcomes. The focus of this paper is on one of these alternative potentials: work–life balance (WLB).

WLB is an individual's perception that they are able

to balance work and non-work activities in a satisfactory manner (Kalliath and Brough, 2008). Work-life conflict (WLC) arises due to incompatible pressures between different roles (Shelton, 2006). There has been increasing interest in WLB in recent years, based on the idea that it improves job satisfaction and performance (Hogarth *et al*, 2001). To date, research has tended to focus on employees and their employers' practices, however (Felstead *et al*, 2002). When WLB has been related to self-employment and business ownership, it tends to have been studied in terms of the potential of these to afford increased opportunity for better WLB than employment; it is viewed as a means by which WLB might be achieved and as a *solution* to WLC (for example, see Baines and Gelder, 2003; Loscocco and Smith-Hunter, 2004; McGowan *et al*, 2011). HBBs in particular have been advocated as contributors to WLB, and this has been based on the idea that the merging of the home and work spheres affords particular flexibility and control (Walker *et al*, 2008; Kirkwood and Tootell, 2008). There is, however, little systematic or empirical study of WLB amongst the self-employed and business owners. The current paper reports on an explorative qualitative study that sought to address this research gap. Specifically, using a mixed methodology, including activity tracking over time and case study-based investigation, the paper reports empirical findings from eight UK-based HBB owners.

The paper is structured as follows. First a review of the literature on HBB and WLB is presented, including that relating to the management of WLB amongst the self-employed in particular. This is followed by a description of the methodology employed for the research and an introduction to the eight cases of HBB explored. Following this, data emerging and summary results of the study are presented, after which an analysis and discussion are provided. The paper concludes with a summary of implications for those with an interest in studying, supporting or practising HBB, and especially WLB within it.

## Home-based business and work-life balance

Whilst it is challenging to define an HBB due to its diversity of form, Dwelly *et al* (2005, p 4) classify it as 'any business or self-employed person that uses a residential property as a base from which they run their operation'. According to Dwelly *et al*, the number of HBBs in the UK has been rising since 1999. Evidence throughout other modern economies supports this: for example, governments in the USA and New Zealand actively encourage the growth of this sector (Small Business Administration, 2013; Porirua, 2013, respectively). Correspondingly, in the UK case, Mason *et al*

(2011) estimate that a third of private sector firms are in fact HBBs. Further, this is likely to be a conservative estimate since there is evidence of at least some representation of HBBs in the informal economy (Williams and Nadin, 2011), where official statistics and estimates are least reliable. Nevertheless, little is known about HBBs, including their contribution to WLB. This is surprising, not only given the apparent scale of the phenomenon, but also because of the various contributions this type of entrepreneurship might be making. These include economic contribution via gross domestic product (GDP) and employment, and the fact that they may have a particularly pertinent role for groups marginalized from other types of employment or self-employment, such as those with caring responsibilities that require them to be in the home, or people in remote and rural locations (for example, see Baines and Gelder, 2003; and Williams and Nadin, 2011, respectively).

WLB as a concept is also opaque and hard to define (Kalliath and Brough, 2008). Essentially, it refers to the boundary between work and non-work time, the achievement of a personal balance of these, and the removal of conflict (Sanseau and Smith, 2012; Felstead *et al*, 2002). As set out by Kalliath and Brough (2008, p 326), the current paper defines WLB as 'the individual perception that work and non-work activities are compatible ... and in accordance with an individual's current life priorities'.

Primarily, WLB is related to an individual's role salience and role perceptions that can have a direct effect on how they see themselves, how roles are attributed, and how they respond to their roles (parent, worker, friend, etc) (Adams *et al*, 1996; Loscocco, 1997; Posig and Kickul, 2004). Pressure to prioritize one role can lead to role distress, thereby resulting in inter-role conflict (Frone *et al*, 1997; Noor, 2004). On the other hand, Posig and Kickul (2004) report that, depending on an individual's perceptions, role prioritization can be a positive experience. Certainly, for most people, different roles and the management of them are desirable; most people are multidimensional, and work and life are complementary (Rotondo and Kincaid, 2008; Pitt-Catsouphes *et al*, 2007). When one role impacts on the quality of experience or performance in another too much or negatively or both, however, work-life conflict (WLC) is the outcome (Shelton, 2006).

Conflict is often caused by the incompatible personal expectations of work and life roles (Baltes and Heydens-Gahir, 2003; Ballout, 2008; Walker *et al*, 2008). WLC comprises stressors associated with work and family and the psychological involvement of the individual with those roles (Frone *et al*, 1997). There are three major types of conflict: time (when time spent in one role affects other roles); strain (the effect of emotions

stimulated by conflicting roles); and behaviour-based conflicts (attitudes, values and behaviours which are inconsistent between roles) (Fu and Shaffer, 2001; Cooper *et al.*, 2001; Shelton, 2006). There is some evidence that stress can be more common amongst entrepreneurs than amongst employees (Jamal, 1997). This is associated with (amongst other issues) the responsibility the entrepreneur bears for the sustainability and success of a business, and the lack of organizational support and infrastructure available for him or her. Time and role management are other particular stressors for individuals, though Drakopoulou Dodd (2011) asserts that time-management-related stress is in fact lower amongst entrepreneurs as they are able, through their independence, to manage this to suit their needs to a greater extent than employees. This of course requires that time management is taken on board as a strategy by an individual. Rotondo and Kincaid (2008) suggest further use of coping strategies to alleviate stressors between work and life in all employment contexts. It is to these strategies that we now turn.

## Coping strategies for managing WLB

In the literature on WLB, five particular issues have been theorized. These are temporal (time management between work and life); spatial (division of space); psychological (the mental division of work and life roles); behavioural (the overlap in work and life activities); and social (conflicting roles and responsibilities) (for example, see Ahrentzen, 1990; Berke, 2003; Baines and Gelder, 2003). According to Becker and Moen (1999) and Baltes and Heydens-Gahir (2003), these vary throughout a person's life, requiring adaptation throughout various life stages, and each has to be managed via what Perrons (2003) calls 'coping strategies': the methods and means used by an individual to resolve stressful situations (Haar, 2006).

By using coping strategies it is possible to manipulate work and life boundaries to reach a state of perceived balance (Berke, 2003). In the context of HBBs specifically, time management and spatial management, the division of work time and space, and life time and space, are particularly problematized; in HBBs work and life time and space are entirely overlapping (Felstead and Jewson, 2000; Berke, 2003; Baines and Gelder, 2003). Despite this, much of the literature on WLB, particularly in organization studies, theorizes that HBBs are a means by which WLB can be managed – that is, starting an HBB *is* a coping strategy (for example, see Boden, 1999; Kirkwood and Tootell, 2008). There are few empirical studies to support this though. Amongst these few, British Telecommunications (2008) report that 58% of those operating an HBB in their

sample claimed the desire for a better WLB as their primary motivation. Similar reports are found elsewhere: Stoner *et al.* (1990) and Thompson *et al.* (2009), for example, both focus exclusively on female-owned HBBs and find that the flexibility and autonomy associated with HBB ownership positively affects WLB. Control over time, and in some cases including reduced working hours, were other benefits identified by Thompson *et al.* (2009).

Alternatively, other research reports that HBBs are not a solution to WLB issues. Berke (2003), for example, reports that the situational characteristics of the HBB are not enough to eliminate WLC, and finds empirically that boundary management issues still feature in the HBB context. Indeed, as noted, there is reason to expect it may be worsened in HBB, a position supported by Ehlers and Main's (1998) findings for women based in HBBs in their sample of female micro-enterprise owners. Further, Loscocco and Smith-Hunter (2004) found that HBB owners experienced no significant WLB advantage in comparison with non-home-based business owners, as both samples in their study struggled to manage dual roles.

There appears therefore to be conflicting evidence in the literature about the utility of HBBs in affording WLB. Some hypothesize that HBBs are advantageous for WLB, while others find the opposite. In the context of the reported promotion of WLB throughout popular culture and amongst governments, plus the conflicting evidence in the academic literature regarding the suitability of HBBs to achieve WLB, four research questions emerge:

*RQ1:* To what extent are HBB owners motivated by WLB?

*RQ2:* Do HBB owners perceive they have greater WLB than in previous work experiences?

*RQ3:* What effect does HBB have on WLB?

*RQ4:* How are the blurred space and time between life and work managed in an HBB?

## Methodology

To address the research questions, a qualitative approach was taken in studying the experiences of eight HBB owners in the UK. Qualitative analysis was considered most appropriate because it allows for results that reflect the positions and viewpoints of those being studied (Bryman, 1988) and includes that which cannot be quantified or when being quantified does not provide any meaningful insight (Cassell and Symon, 1994). While they can be more difficult to generalize, studies with qualitative methods afford us what Stake (1995, p 40) calls 'experiential understanding' of a subject. The

Table 1. Sample group details.

	Anna	Ben	Carol	Deborah	Elaine	Fran	Gail	Harry
Age	25–35	45–54	25–34	55+	45–54	25–34	25–34	25–35
Gender	F	M	F	F	F	F	F	M
Status	Married	Single	Married	Single	Married	Single	Married	Single
Dependants	0	0	2	1	2	0	1	0
Annual turnover (thousand)	£0–£25	£26–£50	£0–£25	£25–£50	£0–£25	£0–£25	£0–£25	£0–£25
Age of firm (years)	0–5	10+	0–5	10+	0–5	6–10	0–5	0–5
Industry	Business consultant	Software developer and business consultant	Business administration and support	Architect	Education – theatre and arts publisher	Physical arts and training	Web design service	Web services for real estate sector

uniqueness of the experiences of those being studied in social science research affords us a depth of understanding through analysis of the commonality and divergence of human or social (or business) experience. This is considered appropriate therefore, since the current paper aims to provide information and understanding of WLB in HBBs from the perspective of the owners. In response to a reported need for methodological variety when undertaking entrepreneurship research (Neergaard and Ulhøi, 2007), a case study methodology, as advocated by scholars such as Yin (2003) and Rubin and Rubin (2005), was used. The case studies were developed by the application of three instruments: a baseline questionnaire; daily reporting of work/life activity over a two-week period; and in-depth interviews with each participant. The aim of this was to provide a rich picture of what participants perceived generally to be their experience of HBB and particularly their WLB within it, and to compare that with day-to-day accounts of the playing out of the HBB role.

Participants completed a baseline questionnaire, providing information about their business, their circumstances and perceptions of their work-life balance (Questionnaire 1). Each respondent was then asked to complete a second questionnaire (Questionnaire 2) each day for two weeks, including weekends. In this second questionnaire, respondents were asked about how they had divided their time and how they had managed different roles. The third stage of the research involved in-depth follow-up interviews with each respondent. As advocated by Yin (2003), the interview approach was informal and semi-structured in order to elicit as much information as possible. Following appropriate practice in interview-based research, all conversations were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Each stage of the fieldwork was designed to triangulate information, and indeed, to compare what respondents claimed to perceive in terms of their WLB and the actual experience of role management over the 'Questionnaire 2' fortnight.

For the purposes of eliciting sensitive information and

opinion, it was agreed with participants that all cases would be anonymized. Following Miles and Huberman (1994), analysis was conducted in the first instance by each researcher individually, and emerging themes were identified by consensus.

To homogenize the sample to some degree, only HBB owners who had advanced education (had been to university) were sourced. This was to access those most likely to be in professions and careers, in turn most likely (relative to non-professional jobs) to contribute to work-life conflict. Given that HBBs are 'notoriously difficult to identify' (Walker *et al.*, 2008, p 262; see also Curran and Blackburn, 2001), a snowball sampling technique was employed, a method used elsewhere in this field (Walker *et al.*, 2008). Initially, respondents were sourced from a local business incubator and a Web forum post. From there, snowballing resulted in a sample of eight HBB owners. To qualify as an HBB, a respondent's business had to be registered at the home address, and work from home had to be undertaken for a minimum of 20 hours per week. Table 1 provides details of the sample of respondents and their firms.

As Table 1 shows, the HBB owners in the sample are represented by both men and women, by people living with a partner, and single people living alone, some with dependants and some without. The firms are typical of micro-enterprises, with no firm reporting an annual turnover greater than £50,000. Most of the firms were relatively young, though two firms – those owned by Ben and Deborah – had been operating for more than 10 years.

## Results

### *RQ1: To what extent are HBB owners motivated by WLB?*

Respondents were asked in Questionnaire 1 their motivations for starting an HBB. Seven out of the eight ranked a WLB-related answer as at least one of their top three reasons ('to balance work and family responsibilities' (3); 'for a more flexible lifestyle' (4)). Interview



data provide further support to suggest that motivations for HBB are associated with anticipated improvements in WLB. In particular, flexibility was noted in all the interviews:

‘Working from home is much more flexible ... if I want to take the dog for a walk I take the dog for a walk. I can take breaks and meals with family when I want. It takes the pressure off.’ (Ben)

There is some evidence that this flexibility is particularly useful to those respondents with dependants:

‘Especially for young families, much more flexible ... you need flexibility.’ (Deborah)

‘For somebody like me, where work and family are important, the cross-over allows a juggling act.’ (Gail)

This is corroborated by Elaine, who has responsibilities to both a child and an elderly parent:

‘Being at home means I can switch to and from parent/daughter role. It’s a no-brainer.’

Other motivations cited in interviews include: ‘it has allowed me to work’ (Ben); ‘low overheads’ (Carol, Elaine and Harry); ‘lack of office politics’ (Deborah); and ‘nobody “watching” you’ (Elaine), this last again inferring the attraction of flexibility and autonomy.

*RQ2: Do HBB owners perceive they have greater WLB than in previous work experiences?*

The responses to Research Question 2 are unequivocally positive. Questionnaire 1 asked respondents to rank various statements on a Likert scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Average scores for all the responses are shown in Table 2.

While several of the items listed in Table 2 are representative of business ownership in general (regardless of location), the overall tone of the answers illustrates a high level of perceived satisfaction with the balance between business and life domains. Interview data also bear out these results. In particular, once again,

**Table 2. Perceptions of work-life balance amongst home-based business operators.**

I have the freedom to decide what I do in my business	4.6
It is my responsibility to decide how my job gets done	4.8
I decide when I take breaks	4.6
I have overall control in scheduling my work hours	4.6
I am responsible for success in my business	4.9
I am satisfied with my business as it is now	4.3
I am satisfied with my life circumstances as they are now	3.9

each respondent asserted the greater flexibility afforded by operating an HBB compared with being in employment. Carol’s statement is typical:

‘I manage my time better – I can control my destiny. I can time-plan for different things...it’s definitely flexible, you can play your times and days as you want to.’

Harry summarizes:

‘Generally it’s good for work-life balance ... the freedom to do whatever I want when I want.’

*RQ3: What effect does HBB have on WLB?*

RQ3 was investigated by taking responses to Questionnaire 1 and statements from the interviews, and comparing them with data reported throughout the two-week ‘logbook’ period of Questionnaire 2. In this second questionnaire, respondents were asked to note each day if they agreed, disagreed (or neither) with the following statements about the impact of the business on home life:

- (1) Because of work/business, I was too tired to do some of the things I’d have liked.
- (2) In my business I had so much work to do that it took time away from my personal interests.
- (3) My business took up time I would have liked to have spent with family or friends.
- (4) My work made it difficult to be the kind of spouse or parent I would like to have been.

Using the same rating system, respondents were also asked to note each day their responses to items designed to infer the effects of family on the business:

- (5) I was tired during work because of the things I had to do at home.
- (6) My personal demands were such that they took me away from work.
- (7) My work colleagues (if applicable) disliked how often I was preoccupied with my personal life.
- (8) My personal life took up time that I would have liked to have spent on work.

In addition to these questions, using the same scale, respondents were asked directly whether they had achieved a good balance between work and home time each day.

Results for RQ3 are revealing in a number of ways. Each respondent’s answers varied throughout the fortnight, suggesting that each day’s experience is different. There was also much variation between respondents, and again, as expected in a study such as this, respondents’ lives and business contexts, and their

perceptions of them, are highly subjective and individual. When data are aggregated, as in Table 3, however, responses to questions about the business affecting home life suggest limited impacts: the total ‘disagree’ responses are greater than the total ‘agree’ responses (193 and 135 respectively). Similarly, total ‘disagree’ responses to questions about negative impacts of family and home life on business are substantially higher than ‘agree’ responses (213 compared with 58). There was no variation between respondents with dependants and respondents without. Thus, responses to the statements in Table 3 illustrate that participants perceived reasonably good balance between work and life, and the impacts of these on each other, in the HBB on a day-to-day basis over the test fortnight. In particular, ‘disagree’ responses each day to the statement ‘*My work made it difficult to be the kind of spouse or parent I would like to have been*’ were common, suggesting that participants tended in that fortnight to feel that the business was not impacting too much on home life and roles. Similarly, from the opposite perspective, the lack of support for the statement, ‘*My personal life took up more time that I would have liked to have spent on work*’, demonstrates that most often participants did not feel their home life and responsibilities negatively

affected the business. In response to the direct question each day about whether participants had achieved a good balance between home and business life, similar results emerge: the majority of responses agreed that a good balance had been achieved.

While the aggregation of responses in an instrument such as this cannot be interpreted as anything other than entirely suggestive, the data reported in Table 3 do suggest that, as with their baseline responses, participants in the study seem to perceive routinely that a work-life balance has been achieved. Most participants consistently disagree that their business life adversely affects their home life, and vice versa, and when asked directly each day, the same perception is expressed.

Other results show a similar matching of perceptions of WLB and the routine experience of operating an HBB. In Questionnaire 1, the baseline exercise, respondents were asked to state how many hours they devoted to their businesses, and how many to their home lives per week. In Questionnaire 2, respondents were asked to note the number of hours they had worked each day. Table 4 shows results for these two questionnaires by weekly hours per respondent.

The first issue of note in Table 4 is that, by and large, participants estimated their weekly working hours very

Table 3. Perceived work-life balance.

Impact of business on home	Agree	Disagree
1. Because of work/business, I was too tired to do some of the things I'd have liked (n = 94).	28	54
2. In my business I had so much work to do that it took time away from my personal interests (n = 101)	42	50
3. My business took up time I would have liked to have spent with family or friends (n = 102).	46	40
4. My work made it difficult to be the kind of spouse or parent I would like to have been (n = 87).	19	49
Total responses about the impact of business on home	135	193
Impact of home on business		
5. I was tired during work because of the things I had to do at home (n = 102).	12	65
6. My personal demands were such that they took me away from work (n = 104).	25	60
7. My work colleagues (if applicable) disliked how often I was preoccupied with my personal life (n = 37).	0	16
8. My personal life took up time that I would have liked to have spent on work (n = 106).	21	72
Total responses about the impact of home on business	58	213
Direct question		
9. I achieved a good balance between work and home (n = 104).	54	36

Table 4. Estimated hours in business and home: Questionnaire 1 versus Questionnaire 2.

	Estimated weekly hours in business (Questionnaire 1)	Reported weekly hours in business (Questionnaire 2)	
		Week 1	Week 2
Anna	40	39	43
Ben	44	38	37
Carol	20	17	26
Deborah	40	24	37
Elaine	25	24	18
Fran	42	18	7
Gail	47	56	46
Harry	60	61	66

accurately. Only two participants gave responses in Questionnaire 1 that varied substantially from the actual hours worked during the two-week logbook exercise. Interestingly, in the two cases (Deborah and Fran), each overestimated in Questionnaire 1 the time they spent on the business. The suggestion here is unclear: it may be that these two weeks were particularly slow business-wise; or one could infer respondent inability to identify clearly typical working hours. Whatever the reason for these apparently anomalous responses, the picture provided by comparing Questionnaire 1 and Questionnaire 2 responses by and large appears to suggest that participants' perceptions of a good WLB born of operating an HBB do correspond to the everyday experiences of doing so.

On the other hand, the interview data are not quite as overwhelmingly positive. Several respondents made specific reference to the difficulties there can be in achieving a balance between work and home. Examples include:

'I do expect to work late ... I will work extra or late hours!' (Ben)

'If stuff needs done it's really hard to switch off and become a homemaker.' (Carol)

'It can be inconvenient if you have a client who is very demanding and wants stuff there and then.' (Elaine)

'I feel guilty about both [home and business].' (Gail)

Other issues emerging include the perceived disadvantages of running a business from home:

'I miss social contact ... I've found it hard to cope with the isolation – social and business.' (Deborah)  
'It's difficult to be at the cutting edge [of industry].' (Anna)

In interviews, several respondents also identified directly a struggle with balance. Gail, for example, noted that she spends much time thinking about work during her home time. Further, she admits:

'I'm not the most organized person ... I don't separate work versus family. It can cause some confusion. I sometimes double-book dates.' (Gail)

Carol admits to similar problems:

'Where I've struggled it's to manage children and my time. A better balance can be achieved without kids.'

She elaborates:

**Table 5. Time and space management as strategies to support work-life balance in home-based businesses.**

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
10. I used a time management strategy to deal with conflicting needs.	40	11	52
11. I used a separate work space.	46	17	26

'I feel I can't control time ... I would like to switch off on non-available days. [I'd like to] try to retain control.'

*RQ4: What coping strategies do HBB owners use to manage WLB?*

In Questionnaire 2, respondents were asked specifically to provide a daily report about time management strategies and about separating work from life space. Table 5 illustrates the aggregated results.

Table 5 suggests that space and time management strategies are employed by the respondents. On a day-to-day basis, though, the suggestion is that there is much variation.

Separate and discrete working space, in particular, appears to be a common means by which respondents demarcate home life from business life in the home. The interviews provide further evidence of this:

All work stuff is in the office, all personal stuff outside the office. There's a divide.' (Anna)

'Separate work space means you can concentrate.' (Carol)

'A physical boundary is an absolute must. I used to have an office in the lounge. With young children – impossible! You need an enclosed area!' (Deborah)

'I had a separate room put aside from the start ... My son and friends know to keep away when the door is closed.' (Fran)

Harry does not have the luxury of separate space for his business, but he also acknowledges the advantages:

'I work at the dining table because it's a small flat ... Spatially separate would be good!'

In terms of time management, the data in Table 5 show some direct attempts to time-manage from day to day. But time management is hard to quantify in this way, as daily time management is inevitably affected by time management and planning that may have gone before, such as operating work hours around children's school times, etc. Interview data provide some further insight, showing two different approaches, with some respondents very strict about their time for work or home, and others managing in a more *ad hoc* fashion:



'I'm organized in work ... You have to be able to categorize things and work to a schedule. It's a mental thing really.' (Deborah)

'I have a time schedule, otherwise I'm all over the place.' (Gail)

'Before I commit to a client I make sure family is served. Family comes first.' (Elaine)

'I expect interruptions. I assess at the time if I am going to allow it or not.' (Ben)

Some conflicting evidence between perceived and actual coping also emerged in interviews. For example, to manage time, Carol claims to 'set ground rules with my husband'. However, she then goes on to state that she does not use any time coping strategies:

'I don't use any. I am flailing around a bit coping on a day to day basis.'

## Discussion

Results from the current research are revealing. First, according to RQ1, WLB does appear to have been a predominant motivating factor for most of the participants. Similarly, in response to RQ2, many respondents expressed that WLB was notably improved by HBB ownership. Results for RQ3 are less clear though. Respondents appear to perceive satisfaction with WLB, but when interviewed face to face they admit that they often struggle to cope with the ongoing management of work and life priorities. This seemed particularly pertinent for Carol, Deborah, Elaine and Gail, all women with children at home, but in fact, it was also noted by those who did not have dependent children, including the two (single) men in the sample. In terms of RQ4 on time and space management, the interviews illustrate some mismatch between perceptions and reality, particularly in terms of time management, though there is compelling evidence of the utility to HBB owners of separating work physically from life within the home by having a dedicated work space.

Overall, participants seem to perceive a greater harmony in their lives compared with their former employment/business experiences. In this sense, HBBs may well be useful for some in terms of improving WLB. The extent to which HBBs can be regarded as a panacea for busy people in terms of managing conflicting commitments and WLB seems to be questionable though. When perceptions of improved WLB are reported, they do not consistently seem to reflect the reality of experience in the day-to-day playing out of work and life roles. Additionally, perceived improvements to WLB seem to exist in the context of consistent and explicit management of roles via coping strategies,

and in this sense the results support Rotondo and Kincaid's (2008) assertion that coping strategies are required to manage roles when work and home overlap. This study suggests further that HBBs are included as another home-based employment context to which this applies. Various idiosyncratic means were employed by participants in this research to manage WLB, and varying levels of success were perceived with regard to how effective their coping techniques were. This variation depended on individual circumstances, and in no small measure seemed to be contingent on the personality, characteristics and business and personal priorities of respondents. This study finds generally that while HBB ownership is often motivated by a desire for WLB, rather than being in and of itself a solution to WLC, as suggested by Boden (1999) and Kirkwood and Tootell (2008), it is instead an alternative employment context within which strategies to manage WLB must be developed. The autonomy of entrepreneurship and the flexibility afforded by combining home and work time and space may make this management easier, but nevertheless it still requires sustained self-discipline.

## Conclusions

The current study is limited in that it reports data from few HBB owners, and as such its results are merely suggestive. The contribution of the paper is, however, that in the absence of much empirical knowledge about the motivations and experiences of HBB owners, and the practice of running a business from home, the suggestions made do not always corroborate the assumed knowledge about HBBs or their owners. The study identifies HBBs as having a role in terms of WLB, but suggests that the experiences therein are complex and idiosyncratic. The one common feature is that, while WLB has been a motivator for all participants, it is achieved to varying degrees and only as a consequence of careful management and the implementation of coping strategies. These strategies seem to be employed on a day-to-day basis and require much sustained discipline on the part of HBB owners. Further, there is no suggestion of an absence of WLC. Home-based businesses are certainly not, as implied in some of the employment literature, a solution or antidote to WLB problems, and while WLC may be managed, it is certainly not eliminated. The implications for those who seek to understand and support independent business activity include an inferred need to engage robustly with the issues and support the requirements of this increasing part of the small firms sector. The evidence in this paper suggests that HBBs are certainly making a contribution by employing and improving the experience of HBB owners. There is therefore latent potential for adding

value to that contribution. In particular, support in terms of coping strategies – especially in the key areas of time management and organization of home and life space – may be useful for this group of practitioners.

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